

REVOLUTION^{AND} SUBVERSION IN LATIN AMERICA

**SELECTED US INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY
★ ESTIMATIVE PRODUCTS, 1947-1987 ★**

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This publication was prepared under the auspices of
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It is also available on the NIC Public Web site at:
www.dni.gov/nic/NIC_home.html under Declassified NIC Publications.



This collection is dedicated to the memory of Robert L. Knight, Jr., Project Manager for the series of historical collections of which this is a part. His intelligence informed everything he did; his grace and good humor remain with us.

Preface

The National Intelligence Council is pleased to issue another in a series of thematic collections of declassified intelligence documents. *Revolution and Subversion in Latin America, 1947-87* begins with early concerns about Soviet influence in the region, traces how these concerns evolved after the Castro Revolution, and concludes with a focus on the emergence of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. A valuable record, this collection will provide historians, intelligence specialists, and the public important insights into the thinking that helped shape US policies toward the region. Although these documents do not constitute the bulk of intelligence reporting and analysis during the period, they do represent the coordinated views of the Intelligence Community and its most authoritative, forward-looking judgments at the time. Their purpose always was to alert policymakers to the challenges ahead.

Our estimative analysis today reflects the best of that tradition—careful review of all available information, reasoned judgments, and clear discussion of the conclusions. The estimative product itself has evolved, however, becoming more inclusive of divergent views and more transparent to show fully the thinking behind the judgments. Today, as well, we reach for expertise wherever it can be found, from academic, business, and think-tank communities—around the corner and around the globe—to bring together good minds and the broadest range of perspectives.

The National Intelligence Council continues to improve the readability, accessibility, and the utility of its estimative products for policymakers. Studying analyses of earlier periods supports that effort. Publication of this volume also reflects our continuing commitment—where feasible and appropriate—to tell the story of intelligence.

Publishing this collection required the efforts of a great number of people. John K. Allen, Thomas P. Elmore and others in the Director/CIA Information Review Office identified and declassified relevant documents. Dr. Riordan Roett, Director of Western Hemisphere Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, wrote the introduction. Patrick Maher, former National Intelligence Officer for the Western Hemisphere, guided the overall project, with his successor John McShane seeing to the finishing touches. Mathew Burrows and his team in the Analysis and Production Staff of the National Intelligence Council worked out the formatting, developed the graphics, and edited the volume for publication. Finally, it is the work over the years of many dedicated officers of the Intelligence Community that forms the collection itself.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christopher Kojm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Christopher Kojm
Chairman, National Intelligence Council

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LATIN AMERICA
MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
★ 1945-1987 ★

US PRESIDENT	DATE	EVENT	
Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945)	1945	February	Mexico City conference attendees sign the “Act of Chapultepec.”
			United States rejects Latin American governments’ request for economic aid.
Harry S. Truman (1945-1953)	1946	February	George Kennan sends his “Long Telegram” from Moscow.
		March	Winston Churchill delivers his Iron Curtain Speech.
	1947	June	Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe is announced.
		July	George Kennan publishes “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” in <i>Foreign Affairs</i> (the “X” article).
		September	Rio Conference attendees sign the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Pact)—United States again rejects economic aid for the region, expressing concern about “potential danger” of Communism.
	1948	March	National Security Council issues NSC-7, “The position of the United States with Respect to Soviet-Directed World Communism.”
		April	In Bogotá, the Ninth International Conference of American States creates the Organization of American States (OAS)—Colombian presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán is assassinated, and thousands are killed in the ensuing violence, called “El Bogotazo.”
	1949	April	North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is created.
	1950	April	Assistant Secretary of State Edward Miller, in a speech to the Pan American Society of New England, comments that the region faces the challenge of Communist political aggression.
		May	President Truman approves a National Security Council memorandum on “Inter-American Military Collaboration.”
Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961)	1953	March	National Security Council issues NSC 144/1, “United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Latin America,” which raises the issue of the need to eradicate poverty to avoid “the drift in the area toward radical and nationalistic regimes.”
		November	Dr. Milton Eisenhower, in a “Report to the President,” warns of possible Communist subversion in the Americas.
	1954	March	Tenth International Conference of American States Meeting in Caracas approves a “Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of the Political Integrity of the American States Against the Intervention of International Communism.”
		June	US-backed forces enter Guatemala to overthrow the government of Jacobo Árbenz.
	1957	February	Herbert Matthews publishes a series of articles in <i>The New York Times</i> on Fidel Castro’s 26 th of July Movement in Cuba.
		July	Fidel Castro releases the “Sierra Maestra Manifesto” focused on political reform.
	1958	May	Vice President Richard Nixon visits Latin America—his motorcade is stoned in Caracas.
	1959	January	Fidel Castro enters Havana.
		April	Castro visits the US and Canada, meets with Vice President Nixon and Congressional committees, lectures at universities, and appears on NBC-TV’s “Meet the Press.”
		December	The United States supports the creation of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).
	1960	March	President Eisenhower endorses CIA recommendation for a “Program of Covert Action against the Castro Regime.”

US PRESIDENT	DATE	EVENT		
Dwight D. Eisenhower (continued)	1960	September	The United States announces funding for the establishment of the Social Progress Trust Fund.	
	1961	January	The United States breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba.	
John F. Kennedy (1961-1963)	1961	September	Foreign Assistance Act mandates the establishment of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).	
		March	President Kennedy unveils the Alliance for Progress.	
		April	The Bay of Pigs invasion to overthrow Castro fails.	
		June	The Pentagon expands the mission of the US Army's Special Forces (the Green Berets) to fight Castro-type guerrilla insurgencies.	
	1962	October	The Cuban Missile Crisis.	
Lyndon B. Johnson (1963-1969)	1964	March	President Joao Goulart overthrown in Brazil—the first of the “new,” anti-Communist military regimes installed in the region is welcomed by the United States.	
			The United States covertly spends at least \$3 million on behalf of Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic campaign to defeat Socialist Salvador Allende in Chile.	
	1965	April	President Johnson sends 22,000 Marines to the Dominican Republic to forestall a possible Communist takeover.	
Richard M. Nixon (1969-1974)	1969	August	The Rockefeller Report on US-Latin American Relations is published.	
	1970	September	Salvador Allende is elected President of Chile.	
	1973	September	General Augusto Pinochet leads a military overthrow of the Allende regime.	
Gerald R. Ford (1974-1977)				
Jimmy Carter (1977-1981)	1979	July	President Anastasio Somoza leaves Nicaragua—Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) regime takes power.	
Ronald Reagan (1981-1989)	1981	November	President Reagan supports the Contras in an effort to overthrow the Nicaraguan government—he signs a “finding” on 1 December 1981.	
		1983	September	The “Contadora Group” (Colombia, Mexico, Panama, Venezuela) mediates a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Central America and adopts a “Document of Objectives” to promote regional democratization.
			October	United States and Caribbean forces invade Grenada to prevent a radical leftist regime from taking power.
	1984	January	Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America (the Kissinger Report) is published.	
		March	José Napoleón Duarte is elected President of El Salvador.	
		September	The “Act of Peace and Co-operation in Central America”, sponsored by the Contadora Group, is signed to foster peace and regional security.	
		November	Daniel Ortega is elected President of Nicaragua.	
	1986	May	Five Central American presidents attend a summit meeting, “Esquipulas I,” to discuss regional security.	
	1987	August	The “Esquipulas II Accord” is signed in Guatemala City to provide a framework for peaceful conflict resolution and economic cooperation—the US refuses to recognize the agreement, which it regards as de facto recognition of the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.	

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ORE: Office of Reports and Estimates
 NIE: National Intelligence Estimate
 SNIE: Special National Intelligence Estimate
 IIM: Interagency Intelligence Memorandum
 M/H: Memorandum to Holders
 ONE: Office of National Estimates

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Foreword

This collection of 23 declassified estimative intelligence products on Latin America is the first such compilation on the region. It is part of an ongoing effort by the Intelligence Community—in this case the National Intelligence Council (NIC) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—to make historically relevant archival material available to scholars and the general public and to promote a broader understanding of the intelligence process.

The documents were produced by the Office of National Estimates (ONE), established in 1950 for the sole purpose of producing “national intelligence estimates,” and, beginning in 1973, by the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) system, an integral part of today’s NIC. The Office of Reports and Evaluations, ONE’s predecessor organization, produced the first document in the collection.

During the 40-year span of the collection, the constituent components of the intelligence community produced a vast number and array of intelligence items on Latin America, many addressing revolution and subversion. Of these items, estimative products, which in some respects are distillations from the broader stream of intelligence production, number in the hundreds. Owing to constraints of space, time, and resources, the editors of this collection were compelled to draw selectively from the archival holdings. Their decision was to focus on documents that addressed subversion and revolution from a regional—or at least sub-regional—perspective as opposed to a country-specific one. They also chose to define Latin America as comprising Central and South America but not the Caribbean, whose countries are more numerous and culturally diverse.

Some of the documents in the collection—particularly those that deal with Soviet involvement in the region—have been declassified before, at least in part. Many have not, however, and well over half of the material in the collection is being made public here for the first time. Where they occur, redactions have been made for reasons relating primarily to intelligence sources and methods and not to the substance of the analysis. The documents are presented intact, retaining evidence of their age.

On the Estimative Process and Product

National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and other estimative products, issued first by ONE and now by the NIC, are the most authoritative intelligence assessments in the US Government. Rather than being the products of a single individual or agency, they reflect the collective judgments of the Intelligence Community. They tend to be more future-oriented than analytic products from the individual intelligence agencies. Finally, because of the high level of the intended audience as well as of those involved in the

final approval deliberations, they constitute a formal historical record of the views the Intelligence Community provided to policymakers at a given time.

The process that generated most of the documents in this collection changed little over the 40-year span involved. In ONE, after a request from policymakers or under the impetus of unfolding events, staffers, usually seconded from CIA subcomponents, produced an initial draft. This draft was subject to several internal reviews. The final draft was reviewed by ONE's Board, a group of 8-15 retired ambassadors and generals, scholars from outside government, and senior intelligence professionals, charged with overseeing the national intelligence estimative process.

Once approved by the Board, the draft was sent to the Community's constituent agencies, whose substantive experts then met in "coordination" meetings to record their agreement or disagreements. As a final act, the heads of the individual agencies met as a group known variously over time as the Intelligence Advisory Council (IAC), the United States Intelligence Board (USIB), the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB), and now the National Intelligence Board (NIB). They approved the estimate or, when disagreement had not been reconciled, registered formal dissent. The Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) then signed the assessment and forwarded it to policymakers, starting with the President. With the advent of the National Intelligence Officer (NIO) system and the NIC, the most significant change in this process was that instead of the drafts being produced "in house," the NIOs as often as not stitched together the estimates from contributions tasked to the various agencies.*

This collection of documents on Latin America, a joint undertaking of the NIC and CIA's Information Management Service (IMS), was compiled and edited by John Allen and Thomas Elmore, both retired senior intelligence officers working under the aegis of the then-NIO for the Western Hemisphere, J. Patrick Maher. A number of other individuals in the NIC and IMS participated in the preparation of the collection.

* All of the documents in the body of this collection were born of the process described here. The two documents in the Appendix are instead uncoordinated items produced by the substantive experts in ONE. Depending on the issue, the quality of the analysis, or other factors, these uncoordinated memos could find their way to the President or other senior policymakers—usually with an explanatory note from the DCI. As far as is known, the two documents in the Appendix did not. They are included to provide a feel for the nature of the informal side of the estimate process and its intellectual rigor.

John K. Allen, Jr.

Mr. Allen is a 30-year veteran of the CIA, having served in operations, analysis, and the management of analysis. He served on the National Intelligence Council (NIC) as National Intelligence Officer (NIO) for Latin America, was Director of CIA's Office of African and Latin American Analysis, and edited several earlier collections of historically significant estimative products. Mr. Allen holds degrees from Virginia Tech, Harvard University and the Air War College.

Thomas P. Elmore

Mr. Elmore is a 40-year veteran of the CIA, having served primarily in analysis and the management of analysis. Mr. Elmore also edited several earlier collections of historically significant estimative products. He has taught at The George Washington University, studied at Harvard University and holds degrees from Rutgers University and Johns Hopkins University. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Intelligence Medal.

J. Patrick Maher

Mr. Maher, a 34-year veteran of the CIA, is a Latin American specialist who served as an analyst and manager of analysis before becoming National Intelligence Officer (NIO) in August 2005. He has lived in Brazil and Colombia. Mr. Maher studied at John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and holds degrees from the College of Wooster and Georgetown University. Mr. Maher was a Congressional Fellow in 1982-83.

John F. McShane

John F. McShane was appointed National Intelligence Officer for the Western Hemisphere in February 2009. A member of the CIA's Senior Intelligence Service with over 25 years of service, he had served earlier as a deputy NIO for Western Hemisphere Affairs and held a number of other posts, including Dean of CIA's Sherman Kent School, Issue Manager for Cuba and for Haiti, and Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the National Security Council. He holds M.A. degrees from the University of Florida and the University of Rhode Island and a B.A. degree from Suffolk University, Boston, Massachusetts.

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Introduction

By Riordan Roett

Dr. Riordan Roett, the Sarita and Don Johnston Professor of Political Science and Director of Western Hemisphere Studies at The Johns Hopkins Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D. C., earned his PhD in political science from Columbia University. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Bretton Woods Committee, he is a former national president of the Latin American Studies Association and holds decorations from the governments of Brazil and Chile. He served from 1983-95 as a consultant to the Chase Manhattan Bank and from 1989 to 1997 as a Faculty Fellow of the World Economic Forum at the annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland. In 2004, SAIS established in his honor the Riordan Roett Chair in Latin American Studies, which was made possible by a gift from Mr. Robert Hildreth, a member of Professor Roett's first SAIS graduating class in 1975. Dr. Roett's most recent publications include: *China's Expansion into the Western Hemisphere: Implications for Latin America and the United States* (co-editor and author), 2008; *The Andes in Focus: Security, Democracy & Economic Reform* (co-editor and co-author); *Mexico's Democracy at Work: Political and Economic Dynamics* (co-editor and co-author).

The documents in this collection of estimative products fall into three groups. The first three, written between April 1947 and December 1952, set the stage for the emergence of a strong and potent argument in official circles that the Soviet Union posed a threat to US interests in the hemisphere. A second set of 13 National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) and other estimative documents prepared between July 1961 and July 1977 reflects the Castro era, following the Revolution in January 1959 and the increased presence of the Soviets in the Americas. The final group of seven, written between June 1981 and May 1987, reflects US policy concerns following the collapse of the anti-Communist dictatorship in Nicaragua and the rise to power of the Sandinista regime.

All three sets of documents reflect some common themes regarding the social and political realities, and the economic distress, in the Americas. While mindful of the emergence of Cold War concerns in the late 1940s and early 1950s, much of the analysis across time places a great degree of responsibility for possible Communist penetration on the failure of local elites to resolve longstanding issues of poverty, inequality, and injustice. And it is clear that the analysts were skeptical that meaningful structural reform would be introduced in an orderly and timely manner. Ironically, and tragically, these issues continue to dominate the debate about the future of the region.¹

¹ For a recent overview of the continuing underdevelopment in the region, see Francis Fukuyama, ed., *Falling Behind: Explaining the Development Gap Between Latin America and the United States* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

In 2007-2008, high commodity prices produced budget surpluses in many countries, but the fiscal accounts have not seen any great improvement in investment in quality education, health and public housing. Income levels continue to stagnate; inequality remains unconscionably high. The region remains highly susceptible to the “resource curse”—overdependence on commodities and minerals; too little emphasis on increasing competitiveness.

While there are other actors in play at different moments—Libya, the Europeans, etc.—the principal antagonists are the US and Cuba, the latter backed by the Soviets. The estimates generally agree that Moscow was keenly aware of the need to avoid a direct confrontation with the US, especially after the 1962 Missile Crisis. But anything that could be done to further Russian interests and/or to embarrass the US was fair game. While Russian support came in a variety of ways—cash, weapons, Russian advisors, etc.—Moscow and Washington understood that the rivalry took place in the broader context of the Cold War. Recent comments by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin of Russia—that his country will seek a wider engagement with the hemisphere—may raise a similar, if different, set of security concerns in the future. For some policy observers, the emergence of China as a new player in the hemisphere raises old questions regarding the security interests of the US in Latin America. To date, there is no evidence that either Russia or China will seek to exploit the presence of regimes antagonistic to the US—Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador come to mind—but the new dynamics of global politics may offer either one or the other new opportunities for a more permanent presence.

As World War II drew to an end, US policymakers prepared for an uneasy peace. While not the major priority in Washington, hemispheric security was viewed as an important issue. Building on the Good Neighbor Policy of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Pan-American concept that began in the late 19th century, a series of wartime meetings of the countries in the region laid the groundwork for the 1945 Conference on Inter-American Problems of War and Peace in Mexico City; it became known as the Chapultepec Conference, after the castle in which the conferees met. The conference was the first attempt to strengthen wartime cooperation against a threat to the hemisphere after peace was achieved. Part III of the Act of Chapultepec recommended a regional arrangement for dealing with matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security. While creating no machinery to administer it, the Act emphasized that the activities be consistent with the purposes and principles of the soon-to-be established United Nations. (Tensions between the US and Argentina were the principal reason precluding deeper institutional arrangements.)

With the end of the war, the administration of President Harry S. Truman debated how best to treat Latin America in a context of global security. US military planners and President Truman wanted to standardize and modernize Latin American militaries and develop a hemispheric defense policy against any outside threat. The State Department and the Congress demurred, fearing an arms race or the re-enforcement of military dictatorships across the southern hemisphere. As a result, Latin America remained outside US arms assistance programs until the 1951 Military Assistance Act.

Relations between the US and the Soviet Union quickly soured following the defeat of the axis powers in 1945. The February 22, 1946 “Long Telegram” from Moscow of George Kennan set the stage for the “containment” of Russia’s global ambitions. Eleven days later Winston Churchill delivered the “Iron Curtain” speech. President Truman, in March 1947, asked the Congress for aid to Greece and Turkey as those governments confronted Communist insurgencies. The Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe followed soon thereafter. The question of hemispheric security soon became a greater priority. In late 1946, the US Ambassador to Argentina noted that the inter-American system already was under attack from Moscow. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America Nelson Rockefeller and fellow policymakers saw Latin America’s economic and social disparities and closed political systems as breeding grounds for Communism. Once again, concern in official Washington over development disparities in the region did not produce a “master plan” for engaging local elite players to undertake a minimal program of social and political reform. And those local, dominant elites would soon learn how easy it was to convince the US that they were an important ally in the fight to contain Communism and possible subversion in the hemisphere.

With an uneasy truce in place between the US and the government of Juan D. Perón in Argentina, plans were made to consolidate the broad policy suggestions negotiated at the Chapultepec Conference. The nations of the hemisphere met in Rio de Janeiro in August 1947—the Rio Conference—to draft the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, or the Rio Pact. It called for the peaceful settlement of disputes among member states before any appeal to the United Nations, the first direct declaration relating to Article 51 of the UN Charter that allowed for the creation of regional alliances. More important, the pact proclaimed that “an armed attack by any State against an American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States.” This was a significant US concession given its history of no permanent or entangling alliances. The promise of collective security was a significant step forward not only for the US but also for members who feared attacks by their more powerful neighbors throughout the region.

The delegates signed the Rio Pact on September 2, 1947. The Treaty would become operative in 1948. As a sign of the importance of the Pact, President Truman traveled to the conference at its conclusion and joined Secretary of State George Marshall and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Arthur Vandenberg. The Senator took the lead for the administration in gaining rapid Congressional approval for the Pact.

One issue did separate the US and its allies in the hemisphere—economic assistance. The question of whether or not there would be funds for economic development for the Americas had been raised at the Chapultepec Conference but rejected by Washington. The creation of the Marshall Plan raised hopes, but they were dashed by President Truman’s speech at the Rio Conference when he stated that the Americas would not be included in the Marshall Plan. Truman commented that “the problems of countries in this hemisphere are different in nature and cannot be relieved by the same means and

the same approaches which are in contemplation for Europe.” Whereas Europe would receive US government aid, “a much greater role falls to private citizens and groups” in Latin America.²

Secretary of State Marshall reiterated that decision in his address to the Ninth International Conference of American States in Bogotá in 1948. The Secretary said that the money for Latin America’s economic development must come from private sources. This decision opened a golden opportunity for local economic groups to forge strong ties with American companies that would become increasingly involved in the region. The interests of many governments became strongly linked with the fortunes of local entrepreneurs and the foreign—mostly American—firms that entered local markets. For the Truman administration, Latin America was not yet threatened by the Soviets; those regions that were—Asia and Europe—required immediate assistance. Just before the Bogotá Conference, the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff concluded “that Communism in the Americas is a potential danger, but that, with a few possible exceptions, it is not seriously dangerous at the present time.”³ The US did support, at the Bogotá meeting, the creation of the Organization of American States (OAS) which was generally viewed as a strengthening of the Good Neighbor Policy.

No further steps were deemed necessary to secure the Americas. While the decision to deny funding for economic and social development in the region remained controversial, official Washington turned away from the region. Adolf A. Berle, a leading State Department specialist on the region, noted a growing lack of interest in the Americas with dismay. “Men [in high office] who know the hemisphere and love it are few,” he said as early as 1945, and “those who are known by the hemisphere and loved by it are fewer still.”⁴ By 1949, the situation had grown still worse Berle thought; complaining about “sheer neglect and ignorance,” he declared that “we have simply forgotten about Latin America.”⁵

Berle may have been too pessimistic. George Kennan, following a trip to Latin America in 1950, offered his view of US policy objectives in the Americas: “First, the protection of raw materials, second the prevention of military exploitation of Latin America by the enemy [the Soviet Union], and third the prevention of the psychological mobilization of Latin America against us.”⁶ He stated that Communists “represent our most serious problem in the area,” and they “have progressed to the point where they must be regarded as an urgent, major problem.”⁷

² Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 332-333.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Peter. H. Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of US – Latin American Relations* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 125.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁷ *Ibid.*

There was a troubling sense among policymakers in Washington that their counterparts in the region were not up to the challenge of confronting security threats without US leadership. Kennan, after his 1950 trip to Latin America, reported that the “subconscious recognition of the failure of group effort finds its expression in an exaggerated self-centeredness and egotism—in a pathetic urge to create the illusion of desperate courage, supreme cleverness, and a limitless virility where the more constructive virtues are so conspicuously lacking.”⁸ Kennan’s conclusion, like that of an earlier political leader, John Quincy Adams, was overwhelmingly pessimistic: “it seems unlikely that there could be any other region of the earth in which nature and human behavior could have combined to produce a more unhappy and hopeless background for the conduct of human life than in Latin America.”⁹

And attitudes did not change with the election of Dwight Eisenhower in 1952. Discussing a possible trip to Latin America by the President’s brother, Milton Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles agreed that it was a good idea. The Secretary is quoted as saying that “you have to pat them a little bit and make them think you are fond of them.”¹⁰ Milton Eisenhower’s trip report would confirm that Communism had explored the Americas. Eisenhower warned that “the possible conquest of a Latin American nation today would not be, so far as anyone can foresee, by direct assault. It would come, rather, through the insidious process of infiltration, conspiracy, spreading of lies, and the undermining of free institutions, one by one. Highly disciplined groups of Communists are busy, night and day, illegally or openly, in the American republics, as they are in every nation in the world.”¹¹

These comments reflect a disturbing reality in official Washington during the late 1940s and 1950s—a condescending, often patronizing, attitude in policy circles with regard to the “aptitude” of the region for democratic politics and balanced economic and social development. The region was relatively unknown in this time period by many in official circles. Fragmentary evidence and uneven press coverage led to a “lumping” together of the countries in the region with little ability to recognize differences in racial structure, cultural patterns, or institutional history.

⁸ Schoultz, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.

The Soviet Union, Latin America, and US Policy before the Cuban Revolution in 1959

The first intelligence document in the collection of twenty-three, ***Soviet Objectives in Latin America, ORE-16***, dated April 10, 1947, was issued at the beginning of the Cold War and as the Rio Treaty and the Organization of American States (OAS) were being established. It quotes ***Soviet Foreign and Military Policy, ORE-1***, that “in Latin America, in particular, Soviet and Communist influence will be exerted to the utmost to destroy the influence of the United States and to create antagonisms disruptive to the Pan American system.”

The report is coldly realistic in its assessment of the possible achievements and interests of the Russians in the region. In case of conflict, the Americas could be shut off from the outside world by a US naval blockade. Latin America, therefore, would not be of use to the Soviets, either as military allies or as sources of supply, in any future war. There are few longterm economic complementarities between the economies of the region and Russia. Soviet propaganda appeals in the region recognize that majority opinion in the American Republics is “not only Catholic and patriotic and thus inherently anti-Communist, but is also strongly pro-democratic and reformist.” This comment reflects the general belief in the US government that if Latin American countries held elections, they were ipso facto democratic. While opposition groups to the local elites did exist, it was clear that the dominant forces were able to manipulate the electoral process to guarantee outcomes that favored the status quo.

“Since it is to the advantage of the USSR to press no objectives in Latin America that might awaken US opinion to a sense of urgency about a possible future war, the eight Soviet Embassies and legations in Latin America conspicuously devote themselves to diplomacy and culture....” Given these realities on the ground, Soviet objectives in 1947 were the development of strong local Communist parties; the Communization of the leadership of the local trade unions; the dissemination of carefully selected propaganda themes that tend to undermine US hegemony in the Hemisphere and make inter-American military cooperation difficult to achieve; and the creation and maintenance of an intelligence network that would obtain for Soviet planners the data they required in order to forward these objectives with a maximum of skill and a minimum of expenditure of effort.

The analysis concludes that Communist parties are strongest in Cuba, Brazil, and Chile but there is little likelihood of an early Communist bid for power. In terms of labor, the Communists are cited as strongest in the CTAL—Confederation of Latin American Workers, which has affiliates in the bulk of the trade unions in the region. They are deeply entrenched and the analysis sees little possibility of neutralizing them. That could pose a threat in any future war, if the unions that extract, process and transport materials that the US would need are controlled by the Communists. By 1947, it was the assessment of the Agency that “Soviet activities in Latin America are clearly based upon thorough knowledge and deep understanding of the main political and economic trends.” This was somewhat of an overreach in the understanding of the US about the

realities on the ground. While there was certainly a growing Soviet interest in the region, the resources available to Moscow were limited and the strength of anti-communist, and therefore pro-American, groups was still dominant during the decade following the end of the Second World War.

The second report for this period, ***Soviet Capabilities and Intentions in Latin America, CIA/RE 34-49***, is dated November 14, 1950. It argues that “the objective of the USSR in Latin America is presumed to be to impose the greatest possible limitations on the support the US receives from the area.” The report states that “on the whole, Communist capabilities for gaining general ideological support of the Soviet position are not great but are important as they are reinforced by certain latent anti-American sentiments.” The Soviets will do all they can to lessen hemispheric solidarity and impair local political stability. Local Communists have “negligible military capabilities in Latin America, and have accomplished practically no significant infiltration into the local military establishments (with the exception of the Ecuadorean Army).” The Communists, the report states, by supporting sabotage, strikes and public agitation, can reduce the potential economic value of the region for the US. The bulk of this report focuses on the potential for war between the US and the Soviets and what damage the Communists could do through submarine action and landing sabotage agents and small commando parties, work stoppages, sabotage of petroleum facilities and railroads, and public agitation.

Conditions and Trends in Latin America Affecting US Security, NIE-70, issued December 12, 1952, is the most interesting of the three reports under review thus far. It directly addresses the issue of the changing nature of Latin American societies: “The traditional social order has been seriously disturbed, primarily by the accelerated-pace of Latin American economic development as affected by structural changes in the world economy, secondarily by ideological influences derived from the world-wide social unrest of the twentieth century.” This Estimate asserts that the old order of gentry in alliance with the Church and the Army is no longer dominant. The preponderance of political power is moving towards urban politicians and “has given rise to political instability more fundamental than that which characterized the personal politics of the past.”

The Estimate was written as the full impact of post-war Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) policy was underway. The arguments of Raul Prebisch and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC), based in Santiago, Chile, were the new template for the region. The Estimate is correct in stating that the region wants a “greater degree of economic independence and stability through such measures as protective tariffs, exchange restrictions, export controls, and government-sponsored industrialization.” The Estimate correctly reports the neglect of agriculture, growing inflationary pressures, and the threat posed by deterioration in the terms of trade.

There is “mounting pressure for radical political change.” The trend toward “radical nationalism” is seen, correctly, as adverse to US security interests—a common expression of such nationalism is “Yankeephobia” (Juan D. Perón in Argentina is cited as a key actor in this regard). The Estimate argues that the Communist threat to US security interests is far greater than formal party membership because “of the ease with which a relatively few Communists operating behind labor, intellectual, and other fronts can exploit the social unrest and Yankeephobia already existing in the non-Communist population.” (Guatemala is cited as a prime example.)

With a few exceptions, the Estimate reports that—in the context of the Korean War—the countries of the region have been supportive of the US. Latin America is cited as a critical supplier to the US of a large number of strategic materials. The Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 is just beginning to have an impact in the region at the time of the writing of this Estimate. It notes that countries in the region are unhappy with the low priority the region receives, in comparison to Europe, with respect to military aid. The Estimate concludes with two scenarios. The first is “Cooperation with the US in a Situation Short of Global War” and the second “Cooperation in the Event of Global War.” In the former, even the growth of exaggerated nationalism will not negatively impact hemispheric solidarity and US security interests. The present degree and scope of Latin American cooperation is likely to remain basically unchanged for the next several years. In the latter, the greatest threat to the US would be Communist sabotage of strategic industries. It is assumed local governments would have the capacity to suppress existing overt Communist organizations. And it is clear that the US believed it could obtain the air and naval facilities necessary for US participation in the defense of strategic areas and sea routes (with the probable exception of Argentina).

This third of these assessments, ***Conditions and Trends in Latin America Affecting US Security, NIE-70***, dated December 12, 1952, is the most comprehensive of the three in identifying the new dynamics in the region: import substitution industrialization, nationalism, pressures for redistribution, and a growing demand for a better standard of living. The permanent decline of the old order is a given. The new order, in the making, is unpredictable, urban based, and opportunistic. Written in the context of the Korean War, the Estimate is sober regarding the costs and benefits of US-Latin American security cooperation in time of global war. One senses from the analysis in all three documents a growing suspicion that the lag in reform, the declining “veto” power of historical groups, and new economic realities, at home and abroad, were going to lead to significant political realignments in some countries unless a reform agenda was implemented. While governments were susceptible to old fashioned military interventions in the years immediately following the Second World War, it was probably impossible to understand the new forces—and resentments—that would emerge on both the Left and the Right in the next decade.

From Castro to Nicaragua: US Security Policy in Latin America, 1959-79

The next set of 13 documents addresses fundamentally different issues than the first group of three. The Eisenhower administration had pressed for, and won, support for a resolution at an OAS meeting in Caracas in March, 1954, that “the domination or control of the political institutions of any American state by the international communist movement....would constitute a threat” to the entire hemisphere and would require “appropriate action in accordance with existing treaties.”¹² Secretary of State John Foster Dulles was the principal US advocate. As Dulles explained, the United States wanted to extend “the Monroe Doctrine to include the concept of outlawing foreign ideologies in the American Republics.”¹³ It was clear to the Latin American leaders participating in the Caracas meeting that the government of Colonel Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán in Guatemala was the justification for the resolution. Árbenz had become, for Washington, a classic case of Communist subversion in the Americas. His strong support for land reform and related social innovations frightened the local elites and, even more importantly, the United Fruit Company. After two weeks of intense debate, Resolution XCIII, the Declaration of Solidarity for the Preservation of Political Integrity of the American States against International Communist Intervention” carried by a vote of 17-1-2 (Only Guatemala was opposed; Mexico and Argentina abstained).

With covert CIA support, an exile force led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas in June 1954 succeeded in overthrowing the Árbenz government. President Eisenhower at a reception for senior Agency officials at the White House in July commented: “Thanks to all of you. You’ve averted a Soviet beachhead in our hemisphere.”¹⁴ The success of the intervention in Guatemala consolidated US opposition to Communism in the hemisphere. Viewed as a great success by Washington, it was seen as a clear warning to Communist elements in the Americas. Indeed, Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, admitted to Congress in February 1958 that there might be “soft spots” within the region, but nonetheless concluded that Communism in Latin America was not “a situation to be frightened of as an overall problem.”¹⁵

The overthrow of the Árbenz regime in Guatemala is now seen as an important turning point in relations between the US and the “Left” in Latin America. The Árbenz government was viewed by most players in the hemisphere as a well meaning, if weak, democratic regime with a legitimate and limited program of reform. Strongly opposed by local landowners, as well as the United Fruit Company, the heavy-handed support for the removal of Árbenz signaled that the US would not support, let alone promote, reasonable social and economic change in the region.

¹² Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Events soon reversed that judgment. In May 1958, Vice President Richard Nixon undertook a two-and-a-half-week tour of eight countries. Beginning in the southern cone, Nixon encountered verbal protests in Uruguay and Argentina, but received a peaceful welcome from President Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship in Paraguay. In Peru, Nixon encountered strong student and labor demonstrations, but Ecuador and Colombia were calm. At his final stop in Caracas, Venezuela, crowds swamped the Vice President's motorcade, almost overturning his car; rocks were hurled and vehement anti-US sentiments were expressed. On his return to Washington, Nixon stated that he had "no doubt that the riots were Communist-planned, Communist-led, and Communist-controlled."¹⁶

Cautiously, the administration began to reassess US policy in the region. It supported the creation of an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in 1959. In September 1960, the Act of Bogotá set in motion the creation of a Social Progress Trust Fund, which was officially established in June of the following year and administered by the IADB. The Act allocated \$500 million, earmarked for health, education, housing, and land reform. The hope expressed in 1945 at Chapultepec for US social and economic assistance finally had been realized.

The promise of aid was overshadowed, however, by the overthrow of the Batista regime in Cuba and the arrival of Fidel Castro and his forces in Havana in January 1959. As the Fund was being discussed in Bogotá in September 1960, Nikita Khrushchev was warning that "Soviet artillerymen can support with rocket fire the Cuban people if aggressive forces in the Pentagon dare to start intervention against Cuba."¹⁷ Fidel Castro, now clearly aligned with the Soviet Union, had stated in mid-1960, that "we promise to continue making the nation the example that can convert the Cordillera of the Andes into the Sierra Maestra of the American Continent."¹⁸

The IADB and Social Progress Fund initiatives were accompanied by the Eisenhower administration's acceptance of a novel concept of social and economic development put forward by Brazilian President Juscelino Kubitschek. The challenge was accepted by the new Kennedy administration in January 1961. A number of initiatives were authorized. The Foreign Assistance Act passed by Congress in 1961 mandated the Agency for International Development (USAID) to administer US assistance programs. President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress also was accompanied by a redefinition of US military aid in the Americas—from hemispheric defense to internal security. To support this new policy, the Pentagon created the mission of the US Army's Special Forces (the Green Berets) to fight Castro-type guerrilla insurgencies. US Military Assistance Advisory Groups were soon stationed in the region. US military schools in

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 356.

the US and the Panama Canal Zone were expanded to accommodate a rapidly growing number of Latin American students, and civic action teams of US military engineers began building roads and related infrastructure in areas thought vulnerable to Castroite guerrilla activity.¹⁹

The first Estimate for the 1959-1979 time period is entitled ***Latin American Reactions to Developments in and with Respect to Cuba, NIE 80/90-61***. Issued on July 18, 1961, it follows the failed Bay of Pigs effort to overthrow the Castro Regime a few months earlier. The Estimate once again recognizes the structural change underway in the region: “The traditional elites are for the most part determined to maintain things as they were, but power is slipping from their hands. The growing middle classes and organized labor have already acquired considerable political strength.” The Estimate notes the changing nature of the Armed Forces: often in the past supportive of the social status quo, in many countries they now recognize the need for reforms within the constitutional framework.

The Estimate correctly states that the danger of a consolidated Castro regime “lies in the conjuncture of a subversive apparatus centered in Cuba which is seeking to export revolution with the increasing discontent among the Latin American lower classes. In many countries the old-line leadership is still firmly resisting reform.” Castro’s early strategy is evident—spreading the revolution among laborers, students, intellectuals, the city mob, leftist parties and, in certain places, the peasants. Castro has relentlessly pursued his goals with an expansive propaganda campaign and the indoctrination, financing and training of small revolutionary groups. In varying degrees, these activities have affected every Latin American country.

The Estimate is probably correct in stating that the governments of Latin America were opposed to Castroism in 1961—but there were already signs that the non-Communist Left, intellectuals, students, journalists, etc., were increasingly attracted to the Cuban Revolution. Driven in part by anti-Americanism, in part by the stalled social reform agenda in most countries, and in part by disgust with the old order that was still prevalent, the region had lost its old moorings with new ones yet to be determined. In 1961, after the Bay of Pigs failure, support for Castro increased and, in some countries, flourished. There is still uncertainty in the Estimate about Castro’s ability to survive: “If Castro succeeds in consolidating his regime, the importance of his influence and example will grow. A Cuba which has succeeded in making a Communist-style revolution would be a compelling example even for those Latin Americans who disliked its methods.” Very prescient.

NIE 85-4-62 is written following the Missile Crisis. Once again, the Estimate is direct—and correct—in stating that “the dangerously unstable situation that prevails throughout much of Latin America is the product of fundamental inequities and historic circumstances; it is not the creation of Castro and the Soviets.” The Estimate tries to determine the future course of Russian-Cuban collaboration and correctly determines

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

that it will be a “continuation of economic and military support ranging from present up to substantially increased levels.” This would maintain Castro’s potential for subversive action at least at its present levels or actually raise it to the point where he could undertake amphibious and/or airborne operations against close-in targets. A detailed overview of Cuba’s subversive activities across the hemisphere is attached as is an estimation of military equipment in Cuba after the withdrawal of the Soviet strategic missiles.

A short **Memorandum** issued by the Office of National Estimates on June 4, 1963 and titled ***Khrushchev, Castro, and Latin America*** (Appendix A) evaluates the implications of the Khrushchev-Castro communiqué, signed on May 23, 1963, as part of the Cuban leader’s visit to the Soviet Union. Its general conclusion is that there was a compromise: Castro will move cautiously and the Soviets will recognize him “as the revolutionary example for Latin America.” It expresses skepticism regarding Castro’s ability to “go slow” given his “own ego, mercurial temperament, and revolutionary inclination.” Again, an important insight that proved to be correct.

Another short **Special Memorandum** on ***Some Thoughts on Subversion in Latin America*** (Appendix B) was issued on May 28, 1963. It assumes, correctly, that “the real threat to the existing order...in Latin America comes not from peasant hordes aroused to action by the siren calls of Marx, Lenin, Mao or Castro, but from the hordes of unemployed or underemployed in the burgeoning metropolitan centers.” The Memorandum argues that “ambitious military men” will provide the leadership. The Memorandum appears to buy into the then prevailing argument that nationalist, leftist forces would overwhelm weak, traditional elites. What happens of course is the opposite. Beginning in March 1964 in Brazil, nationalist-conservative bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes of varying degrees of competence seize power, suppress the leftist nationalist forces and persecute the Communists and their allies. Beginning with the overthrow of the government of President Joao Goulart of Brazil in early 1964, a “new” military came to power across the continent. While the regime in Brazil was probably the most successful—until that of General Pinochet in Chile in 1973—most of the military governments were a disaster. Understanding little about economics or planning, they proved to be rapacious, repressive and ultimately, disastrous.

NIE 80/90-64 on ***Communist Potentialities in Latin America***, dated August 19, 1964, provides a detailed overview, country by country, and makes a number of important points. “We doubt that present efforts to reform Latin American society will have any fundamental effect over the short run in most countries.” And “the Communists most striking success has been among middle class students and intellectuals.” The Estimate is again correct in stating that the USSR, Communist China and Castroist Cuba may endorse revolutionary activity, but it must be initiated on the ground in each country. The Estimate concludes with the comment that it is unlikely the Communists will gain control of any country in the foreseeable future but that “there is a real danger inherent in the situation and that danger will persist for at least a generation.” The principal concern in the Estimate is the capacity of a few dedicated Communists to exploit sentiments of anti-US nationalism.

Special Memorandum 31-65, *Some Thoughts about the Latin American Left*, issued on December 29, 1965, correctly states that the “size of the Latin left is a natural outgrowth of the area’s social and economic inequities: the relatively small number of the wealthy, the great mass of have-nots, the unenlightened practices historically of most private capitalists, the slow and inefficient course of governmental reform programs.” There follows a discussion of the “left” in the region—“something that is remarkable for its diversity and lack of cohesiveness—a strange (and sometimes wonderful) conglomeration of disparate, and usually competing, groups and parties.”

***Insurgency in Latin America*, NIE 80/90-66**, February 17, 1966, offers a gloomy assessment of the state of play: “there is no ready antidote to the actual or potential threat of violence and insurgency in Latin America.” But in reviewing the “operational insurgencies” in Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and Venezuela and “incipient insurgencies” in Ecuador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic, none is viewed as a direct threat to the existing governments. Castro will attempt to manipulate each situation to his own advantage with financial support, propaganda, etc., but the insurgencies “have been hindered by the disunity of extremist groups, the want of willing martyrs, and the failure to attract much popular support.”

Latin American Insurgencies Revisited appeared on February 17, 1967 as **Special Memorandum No. 1-67**. Referring to the previous insurgency document, this one asserts, correctly, that insurgent movements have not prospered. Part of the explanation is that Soviet policy reflects increasing doubts about the efficacy of armed struggle as a revolutionary tactic in the region. Soviet propaganda emphasizes the political approach. In sum, the prospects for the incipient insurgencies that do exist are not bright.

NIE 80/90-1-69, March 20, 1969, ***The Potential for Revolution in Latin America***, is relatively sanguine: “the prospect for successful revolution through violence.... does not seem strong in any country.” This is particularly true in the seven largest countries. The Estimate does indicate that if Salvador Allende were to win the 1970 presidential election in Chile, the government “would probably undertake policies intended to produce changes of a revolutionary character.” This is the first of the 23 documents that directly addresses the emergence of the military. It notes that there have been 15 coups in 10 countries since 1960. The point is well taken that “military interventions in general...tend to diminish the immediate prospects for success of revolutionary forces in any sector of society outside the entrenched military establishments.” Looking forward a decade, the Estimate argues that “the existing Communist parties, Castroist parties, and splinter movements of similar genre will not play the central role in this revolutionary process”; a second proposition is that “the forces which undertake future revolutions will develop and operate primarily in the cities.” The Estimate also asserts that “the source of leadership will vary from country to country; the personality, magnetism, courage, and machismo of leaders will be of much more importance than

the class or occupation they represent.” Finally, “these various future movements to achieve revolution will have one feature in common: a nationalistic, independent attitude with strong overtones of anti-US sentiment.” Throughout the Estimates written during these years, the sense of the US losing ground in the region is very strong.

ONE Memorandum titled *The Changing Revolutionary Process in Latin America*, issued on February 23, 1971, constitutes a “rethink” of that process. Its authors believe that “the launching of revolutions is likely to depend more on the deliberate plans of determined men within established institutions than on the actions of individual leaders outside the system seeking to contrive or exploit a ‘triggering’ event.” Velasco in Peru and Allende in Chile are mentioned. While political violence is a fact of life in the region, it is becoming less important as a factor in the revolutionary process. Communist groups in general have failed to influence the revolutionary process by insurgent or terrorist methods. And in a hard headed conclusion, the Estimate argues that the Soviets are likely to run into serious problems in Latin America in trying to fill “vacuums” left by the US. Increasingly, Latin governments, “more adept at riding the revolutionary tiger within their own countries,” will want—and will be able—to exclude all outsiders “who might want to ride or to tame the tiger for them.”

The final three analyses for this time period consider the roles of the Soviet Union and Cuba in the region. *The Soviet Role in Latin America*, NIE 80/90-17, dated April 29, 1971, offers a sober assessment of the roles played by the Soviets and the US: “the preponderant position of the US is eroding and at an accelerating pace....conversely, the Soviet Union and other countries as well are more and more looked to by nationalistic elements as a balance to American preponderance...often for purely opportunistic reasons.” The analysis may be influenced to some degree by the then dynamic nature of the Velasco government in Peru (1968) and that of Allende in Chile—a vindication of the *via pacifica* that Moscow had publicly advocated for years. Carefully assessing the instruments of Soviet Policy in the region—diplomatic relations, covert and subversive efforts, relations with Communist parties, insurgency and terrorism, trade and aid, air and sea communications, cultural, educational and propaganda matters, and military activities—the Estimate appears to give greater influence to the Soviets than the facts warrant. The final conclusion, however, is that “the US will almost certainly remain the predominant foreign power in the area and the one whose policies and presence are the most important to the region.” After reading this Estimate, one feels that the author is anxiously trying to find reasons why the Soviets will be a challenge, but finds it difficult to justify in practical terms.

The second Estimate, *Cuba and Its Latin American Relationship*, NIE 85-73, dated November 1, 1973, is a cold and clear assessment of the Cuban regime: “after 14 years of convulsive political and social change, [the Cuban Revolution] has reached a more cautious and pragmatic stage.” While there has been success in education and public health programs, there have been a series of failures in the economic sector. Cuban reliance on Soviet aid is a given. In an astute summary of Fidel Castro’s status,

the Estimate comments, “part Communist, part nationalist, part caudillo, Castro is still the *lider maximo*, and is likely to remain so. In the event of Fidel’s death or incapacitation, power would probably pass smoothly to a similarly oriented government headed by Raul.” And so it came to pass in 2007-2008!

The third and last document for this period, ***Cuban Support for Nationalist Movements and Revolutionary Groups, Interagency Intelligence Memorandum-77-020C***, July 1977, offers a balanced overview of Cuba’s involvement in the hemisphere: “during the past several years, the Cuban government has provided only very limited and selective support for Latin American revolutionary groups.” Surveying Latin America, the Memorandum mentions the following countries: Chile, Uruguay, Bolivia, Guatemala, Argentina, and Puerto Rico. There is no mention of Nicaragua or El Salvador, both of which, in just a short time, would become the principal focus of Cuban revolutionary support and of US foreign policy in the region. It is still a matter of debate whether or not the intelligence community overlooked or failed to take seriously the emerging fault lines in Central America. Those issues may well have been discussed in still classified documents, of course.

These three documents summarize the calm before the storm. A Soviet presence is a permanent fixture in Cuba. The failure of the Allende experiment in 1973 in Chile clearly set back Moscow’s *via pacifica* strategy in the Americas. The emergence of the Pinochet regime and the consolidation of other hard-line military governments (with the exception of Peru between 1968 and 1973) have dramatically curtailed revolutionary activity. Cuba’s internal economic failures have continued and will not change significantly. While still the maximum leader of the Revolution, Castro appears to be a more benign presence at home and abroad. Revolutionary support for vanguard groups has decreased.

Based on the intelligence available, these final three Estimates provide an accurate overview of the facts on the ground as of mid-1977. The White House of President Jimmy Carter had issues with the military regimes in the region over human rights violations, but its early efforts to reach out to the Cuban regime, while controversial, appeared to yield fruit. Interests sections were opened in both countries. Exchanges and family visits increased sharply. Conversations were held on further relaxation of tensions. Although much of that would come to an end midway through the Carter administration, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to imagine the extraordinary opportunity given to the Cuban Revolution by the advent of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua.

Cuba, Nicaragua, and the US: Revolutionary Movements in Central America, 1979-1987

Everyone appears to have a different reference point for the emergence of the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN or Sandinistas) in Nicaragua. The group itself usually uses the spectacular raid on a farewell party for the departing US Ambassador in December 1974 as the point of their emergence. Hostages were taken, the

Archbishop of Nicaragua mediated, and the government of Anastasio Somoza released 14 imprisoned Sandinistas and provided \$1 million in cash. The Sandinistas also published a 12,000-word communiqué denouncing Somoza and US imperialism and called for the people of Nicaragua to rise up and join the *Frente* to overthrow Somoza.²⁰ The Sandinistas then flew to Cuba to receive a hero's welcome from the Castro regime. Somoza declared martial law and launched a bloody process of repression, and by the next year it appeared that the movement had been sufficiently contained and was no longer a threat.

Given that perception, according to Dr. Robert Pastor, a leading Latin American scholar, "there was no specific policy toward Nicaragua early in the Carter presidency; there were only human rights policies that applied to Nicaragua. Outside of this framework, US relations with Nicaragua received low priority."²¹ Can we assume that was also the case in the intelligence community?

On October 13, 1977, small groups of Sandinistas attacked a National Guard barracks and several police stations. The leadership stated that they had no intention of installing a Communist regime; they only wanted to overthrow the dictatorship and establish democracy. They also said that they received no money or weapons from the Castro regime and that no Nicaraguan guerrillas had been trained in Havana since 1970. On January 9, 1978, the undisputed leader of the moderate opposition, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, was assassinated "and another revolution had really begun."²² While official Washington appeared more concerned with the Soviet-Cuban military intervention in the Horn of Africa, events in Nicaragua were boiling over. On August 22, 1978, a group of Sandinistas captured the National Palace and 1500 people in it. Somoza once again negotiated, released political prisoners, paid \$500,000 in cash and published another Sandinista revolutionary communiqué. This time, the Sandinistas flew to Panama and Venezuela. In September 1978, fighting spread to five major cities. The Sandinistas launched coordinated attacks on National Guard detachments. Mediation took place, at various levels, between October 1978 and February 1979. The Carter administration imposed sanctions in February 1979; it then withdrew from the crisis.

As Dr. Pastor assessed it: "In the end, the mediation failed. Instead of serving as a transition toward democracy, the mediation served as a resting place on the road to revolution. On that road, tragedy was wrapped in unintended irony; it was the very success of the mediation in almost achieving a plebiscite and a united moderate opposition that motivated the FSLN to bury their differences and develop a winning strategy."²³

²⁰ Robert A. Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Somoza departed from Nicaragua on July 17, 1979. The National Assembly had accepted his resignation and appointed Francisco Urcuyo, the Speaker of the Lower House, as Acting President. On July 20, another transition took place as the Sandinista junta arrived in Managua and was sworn in at the head of a coalition representing the spectrum of anti-Somoza forces. At the suggestion of the US, Costa Rica, Mexico, and the Andean Pact countries all pledged an active role in Nicaragua, to prevent it from becoming “another Cuba.”²⁴ The new government sent a note to the US on July 23, 1979, indicating that it wished to uphold its international agreements and continue good relations with the US. The US confirmed the request and affirmed its interest in good relations.

With hindsight, could the US have prevented the Sandinistas from ultimately coming to power? Would strong pressure earlier on Somoza and his cronies by Washington have worked? Was there a strong democratic “middle” in Nicaragua that would have been a realistic antidote to revolution? Of course, we will never know, but it is clear that the US did not seriously contemplate such a strategy. Today, the US is seeking ways to deal with the return to power through democratic elections of Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas. As Ortega increasingly identifies with the anti-American, anti-market forces in the region, little appears to have changed in the dynamics of Nicaraguan politics. Weak and often corrupt governments failed to introduce meaningful reform after the Sandinistas were originally defeated. Now, the Sandinistas have returned with little to offer other than warmed-over rhetoric and demagoguery.

We now know that the Sandinista Directorate almost immediately began discussions about supporting their Salvadoran and Guatemalan *compañeros*. The issue was not resolved for more than a year. Meanwhile, a fierce debate erupted in Washington with regard to US policy. Conservatives demanded that the US provide no assistance to the government in Managua unless there was absolute proof it was not supporting insurgents in neighboring countries. Congress demanded that President Carter “certify” and confirm that fact. On September 12, 1980, Carter signed the certification: “on the basis of an evaluation of the available evidence, the Government of Nicaragua ‘has not cooperated with or harbors any international terrorist organization or is abiding, abetting, or supporting acts of violence or terrorism in other countries.’”²⁵

Within a short time, the Salvadoran guerrilla groups, with Cuban help, united to form the military Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). President Carter lost the November 1980 election to Ronald Reagan. Even without conclusive evidence, the new Administration believed the Sandinistas would try to overthrow its neighbors; the Sandinistas provided the evidence that confirmed their worst suspicions. “This new Administration...drew very different lessons than its predecessor had from the experience of the Cuban revolution.”²⁶ President Reagan’s Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, chose to draw the line against the Soviets in El Salvador and in his memoirs described the Administration’s approach succinctly: “it is our view that this is

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

an externally managed and orchestrated interventionism, and we are going to deal with it *at the source*.”²⁷ Haig released the evidence of Soviet-Cuban involvement in a White Paper in February 1981. President Reagan decided to terminate aid to Managua on April 1, 1981. On March 9, 1981, Reagan had signed a “Presidential Finding” authorizing the CIA to undertake covert actions in Central America to interdict arms trafficking to Marxist guerrillas. Using the authority provided by that finding, CIA agents began to organize disaffected Nicaraguans. Thus were born the infamous “Contras” and the “war” for the heart and soul of Central America began. The US National Security Council decided officially to support the Contras in November 1981.

The first declassified Estimate in the collection to address the deteriorating security situation in Central America, **NIE 85/80/90-81, Cuban Policy Toward Latin America**, is dated June 23, 1981. Its tone could not be more different from the NIE of July 1977. “Two years ago, Cuba reverted to much more militant support of revolutionary insurgents, especially in Central America. Castro sees promising opportunities through the promotion of insurgency to advance the cause of revolution in the region, restore a sense of revolutionary momentum at home, and enhance Cuba’s security—by helping sympathetic regimes come to power in the area and by pursuing policies to justify and possibly increase Soviet support for Cuba.... Under most circumstances...Castro probably will continue and even expand his support of regional revolutionaries.”

As we know now, “after examining the evidence, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Advisor all agreed that the proof was not conclusive that the Nicaraguan government was directing the arms smuggling [into El Salvador].” That opinion resulted in the September 12, 1980 certification by President Carter. Between that decision and the first declassified NIE of June 1981, an escalation of Soviet activity in the region takes place: “Only if the United States were to raise substantially the costs and risks to the Soviets of their troublemaking in the region would the Soviets pull back—and that would be only temporary—from their support for the insurgents.”

The NIE points to nationalism and suspicion of US intentions in Latin America. But it argues that “greater US political, economic, and security involvement in the region—while not likely in the near term to alleviate substantially the root causes of instability—could shore up beleaguered governments, help bring about nonviolent change, and thus reduce Castro’s ability to gain the advantage.” This first declassified Estimate, at the beginning of the decade-long war in Central America, is realistic: “his [Castro’s] challenge to US regional interests will continue to be formidable. Despite Cuba’s many weaknesses, it retains considerable assets for furthering its interests.” Supporting analysis is provided in an attachment. The materials lay out in detail evidence of the deepening involvement of Cuba, the USSR, and Nicaragua in the civil war in El Salvador. Following the success of the Sandinista revolution, the Soviets revised their view of revolutionary warfare in Central America. While using Cuba as the principal antagonist, Moscow sees vast opportunity for creating problems for the US and for furthering the cause of Communist revolution.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

NIE 82/83-81, *Insurgency and Instability in Central America*, issued on September 9, 1981, captures the emerging sense of crisis within the intelligence community: “Communist exploitation of trends in Central America constitutes the most serious challenge to US interests and freedom of action in the hemisphere since Cuba became allied with the USSR.” The Estimate is pessimistic about the possibility of halting Central America’s “slide” toward increasing instability over the next 12 to 15 months. It points out that Moscow, while allowing Cuba to take the lead, has gradually expanded its involvement—with support from Eastern Europe, some Communist and Arab states, and the PLO. The greatest threat, states the Estimate, is increasing violence in El Salvador and Guatemala. Looking to the future, “any defensive interdiction effort would have to center on Honduras.” The Estimate also points out that a continuation of the deteriorating situation in Central America will have ramifications for the greater Caribbean Basin. Venezuela, Colombia and other countries, it comments, are increasingly concerned about Cuban and Soviet adventurism in the Isthmus and perceive further threats to their own internal security. Annexes provide in depth “country outlooks” and an overview of “Cuban Armed Forces and the Soviet Military Presence.”

Two Estimates issued in June 1982, **SNIE 82/83-82** and **SNIE 11/80/90-82**, provide a sobering overview of the situation in Central America. The first, ***Short-Term Prospects for Central America***, indicates that moderate groups have been strengthened but “it should be emphasized...that the magnitude and complexity of domestic vulnerabilities and Communist-supported subversion in Central America will remain so great that the recent positive developments will almost certainly not be sustained in the absence of continuing strong external support.” The positive developments mentioned include fair elections in Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador, and moderate leadership in Guatemala. Violence and terrorism did not stop or disrupt the electoral process. Factional rivalries have somewhat reduced the effectiveness of the guerrillas in Guatemala and El Salvador. Despite these positive events, “The dominant aspect of Central America’s future will remain the weaknesses of moderate societies there, and the continuing efforts of Cuba, Nicaragua, and their allies to promote Marxist revolutions in the area.” The overall theme of the Estimate is that failure is not inevitable if there is continuing strong international support for democratic forces: “there is no inexorable downward path ahead.”

The second June 1982 Estimate addresses ***Soviet Policies and Activities in Latin America and the Caribbean***. Its general theme is similar to that of its predecessor: “Soviet activity and interest in Latin America have increased significantly in the past few years, and in the aftermath of the battle for the Falklands the Soviets and their Cuban allies will be probing for new opportunities.” The Estimate is clearly based on the assumption of a “long haul” in addressing the Soviet-Cuban alliance in the region. But the Estimate, sounding a note of pragmatism, indicates that Latin America’s geographical remoteness from the USSR has tended to relegate it to the periphery of Soviet security concerns. Over the years, Latin America has been less important in Moscow’s rivalry with the US than other Third World areas such as Asia and the Middle

East. The Estimate also points out that Moscow has moved in ways to avoid directly provoking the US. Its support for revolutionary movements has been low key, often employing intermediaries and surrogates.

There is a hiatus of almost three years in the collection following the June 1982 Estimates. That period saw growing involvement of human rights groups, other NGOs, the press, and, most important, the US Congress in the ongoing conflicts in Central America.²⁸ As Dr. Cynthia Arnson makes clear, the Central American debate reflected a wider discussion in the US about American power after the US defeat in Vietnam. Many politicians were skeptical about the use of military force to resolve local social and political problems in the Third World. Liberals backed away from the use of the military overseas; conservatives, fearful, as always, of the advance of communism, "took up the liberals' fallen flag of US internationalism."²⁹

SNIE 83.3-2-85, *Nicaragua: Support for Regional Insurgency and Subversion*, issued in March 1985, points out that 1984 was a "year of shifting patterns." Managua's growing problems with its own insurgency and indirect US pressure are significant. With the democratic election of President José Napoleón Duarte in El Salvador and the increasing capabilities of that country's armed forces, the likelihood of a near term victory by the guerrilla forces has diminished. There is also a need for greater discretion on the part of the Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Soviets because of the Manzanillo and Contadora negotiations which have focused greater attention on Managua's support for regional insurgents. But the Sandinistas continue to provide military materiel and training. Nicaragua also serves as a communications base for the insurgents in El Salvador. The Estimate provides an overview of Nicaraguan support for Radicals throughout Latin America.

IIM 86-10010, *Prospects for Leftist Revolutionary Groups in South America*, was issued in July 1986. Surveying "the nature and seriousness of revolutionary activity in 10 South American countries," the Memorandum observes that leftist revolutionary groups are active in four of the 10 South American countries: Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador. In Argentina and Uruguay, the remnants of former insurgent groups such as the Montoneros and the Tupamaros have taken advantage of a return to civilian government to rebuild and reorganize but do not appear to pose a significant threat. In Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia and Paraguay, there are no active revolutionary groups and no existing radical groups appear likely to evolve into significant revolutionary threats during the next few years.

The Memorandum indicates four factors that may contribute to revolutionary violence: increasing political latitude; growing economic disarray; expanding support from external patrons; and improving cooperation among insurgent groups. Cuba remains the principal source of support for South American revolutionaries. The general conclusion is that "despite the expected extent of insurgent activity, no leftist

²⁸ See Cynthia J. Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, the President, and Central America, 1976-1993*, 2nd ed. (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

revolutionary movement is likely to come to power in South America during the next few years.” Evolving democratic processes, which began in Argentina in 1983 and culminated in Chile in 1990, were a key factor in changes in most South American countries.

An Annex titled “Revolutionary Movements: Country Profiles by Category,” provides an excellent assessment of the two most dangerous movements: the Sendero Luminoso (SL) in Peru and The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The last estimative product in this group of 23 declassified documents is another Memorandum, **IIM-87-10005, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador***, issued in May 1987. It treats “Ecuador as an exceptional case, where security forces have delivered major, perhaps decisive, setbacks to urban terrorists.” As the last document, it is prescient in that the two groups that it analyzes, the SL and the FARC, do become the greatest threats to regional stability once the Central American situation stabilizes a few years later. There is no evidence of direct Soviet support to either group, although Moscow probably maintains limited contact and influence through intermediaries. Cuba’s influence is significant only in Colombia. Nicaragua and Libya play supporting roles in Colombia. The analysis is very clear in confirming the FARC’s ties, widely unknown at the time, to drug traffickers. As proven later, both democratic governments—Alan García Pérez in Peru and Virgilio Barco Vargas in Colombia—do not have sophisticated strategies in place to neutralize and/or eliminate the guerrilla insurgencies. There is a shortage of trained personnel and equipment, logistic weaknesses, poor intelligence, and declining military budgets. The estimative outlook, proved to be correct, is that “security conditions in Peru and Colombia will worsen over the next two years.” The SL would not be contained until the advent of the Fujimori government in Peru in the 1990s; while the FARC is weaker, they remain a significant security issue for Colombia in 2010.

Conclusion

The 23 estimative documents in this declassified collection offer a sophisticated and objective overview of Soviet activities, both alone and with their surrogates, in Latin America from 1947 to 1987. As the Cold War quickly escalates, concern in Washington, in both Democratic and Republican Administrations, over Moscow’s intentions in the hemisphere grows. Two important turning points inform the analysis: the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro in 1959 and the Sandinista Revolution in 1979. The former sets the stage for Russia’s entrance into the Americas in support of revolutionary movements; the latter provides a new lifeline for both Cuba and the Soviet Union that appeared to have settled into a relatively benign position in the middle of the 1970s. That quickly changes with the fall of the Somoza regime and the escalation of conflict in Nicaragua and El Salvador, the emergence of the Contras, the breakdown of diplomatic negotiations and, ultimately, a political solution in the late 1980s.

The documents indirectly highlight the different approaches of the White House in the period under consideration. From relatively early in the Truman administration, there is concern over Soviet goals in the region. Beginning in 1959-1960, there is a heightened awareness of the implications of the Cuban Revolution for US security interests and political stability in the region. With the collapse of the Somoza government and the startup of the civil wars in Central America, the conflict in that region is viewed by the Reagan White House as an important component of the global East-West conflict. While the Soviets never made Latin America a principal focus of policy or intervention, they played their hand astutely in using Fidel's Cuba as their surrogate with occasional help from Libya, Eastern Europe, and the Palestine Liberation Organization among others.

In the event, however, the end of the conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua was followed relatively quickly by the implosion of the Soviet Union itself. The very late 1980s and 1990s thus posed a much different set of foreign policy questions for the US government.